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Memorandum

THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM
(As of 1400 EST)

26 January 1965

State Dept. review completed

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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GROUP 1

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26 January 1965
No. 0751/65

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM
(AS OF 1400 EST)

1. There are strong indications that General Khanh is preparing imminent action to remove Premier Huong, possibly tonight. Although Khanh has given no timing, General Thi, the commander of I Corps in the north, has told the press that there may be a change of government on 27 January Saigon time (tonight EST). On 25 January, Tri Quang stated that, in two more days, a "new element" would be involved in the Buddhist-Huong dispute. On the same day General Ky stated that he was charged with interviewing civilian candidates for a new government, with a three-day deadline. The US Embassy will not necessarily get advance notice, despite Khanh's promise.

2. Khanh saw Deputy Ambassador Johnson again on 26 January, and repeated the views he had expressed over the weekend, viz.: the problem with the Buddhists was grave; the Buddhists cannot retreat and Huong's handling of them is inflexible; and a blow-up in the near future is inevitable. Khanh still insists that Huong and Chief of State Suu have "offered" to turn over power to the military, and says he desires a US "go-ahead." There are signs that the military may try to move behind a figleaf of legality by convening a reconstituted High National Council, which would call for Huong's resignation.

3. Khanh maintains that he fears prolongation of the present situation will lead to Huong's downfall and a proneutralist successor. He says he has a written agreement from the Buddhists to a military takeover, a moratorium on Buddhist politics, and the departure from the country of some Buddhist militants. Although there is evidence that the Buddhist leadership is trying to induce a military

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coup and may be willing to use Khanh, the Embassy has observed to Khanh that Buddhist leaders cannot be relied on to honor any such agreement or to refrain from similarly obstructing or attacking any successor government. This appears to be a valid assessment.

4. Premier Huong maintains that he never offered to resign, he will not leave office unless forced out. He argues that the Buddhist leaders lack a solid following and can be isolated, provided the military support a strong course, at least until elections can be held. However, although the Buddhist anti-Huong campaign has until now lacked widespread public backing, the campaign is gathering steam. The Buddhist hierarchy has considerable influence among student groups, and the self-immolation by a Buddhist girl on 26 January in Nha Trang may further rouse passions in their favor. This is particularly true in I Corps, where the government's emissary General Thieu has described the situation as grave and where General Thi and his deputies show little inclination to curb Buddhist-student demonstrations.

5. Although Khanh's views of the present danger appear to be widely shared by the military, reporting indicates considerable disagreement among the generals over courses of action. There are reports of military opposition to Khanh, both by elements favoring cooperation with the Buddhists and those urging curbs on the Buddhists. Some early move against Khanh cannot be ruled out.

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